

# Go Northwest, Young Man!

SINCE reporting on the Alaska Statehood Bill in the July HGN some readers hope the new state will use proper caution in the disposal of the 103.5 million acres she is to receive from the Federal government. In this connection, James L. Busey, a professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Colorado, Boulder, who lived in Alaska from 1927 to 1946 and who recently visited the territory during the statehood celebration, comments as follows. "While the new Alaska State Constitution, in its article on natural resources, makes occasional reference to 'the public interest' and the 'common use' of fish, wildlife and water, there will nevertheless be plenty of opportunity under the new constitution for the outright sale of great tracts of land without sufficient guarantee either of a fair price or of a sufficient return to the state for increased values, to say nothing of an adequate assurance against abuse of the resources themselves."

According to Professor Busey, the land has all been subject to homestead laws and homestead abuses heretofore, and its fate under the new state arrangement may be no worse than it was before. Up to now people have been able to grab 160-acre pieces of such federal land, and

with the most perfunctory kind of improvement have secured full title to them. Under special GI provisions veterans have been said to have obtained large acreages and have "improved" them simply by burning them off. This has resulted in tragic erosion and destruction of forests, and the "improvement," plus the hauling in of some sort of shack on skids, has given veterans full title to great tracts of land. The conditions with regard to 5-acre homesteads, which have required only a minimum of improvement for title, and which for GI's have required substantially no improvement at all, have been even worse.

Since the population of Alaska has been growing by leaps and bounds, the people who have secured title to 160 acres for a \$16 fee plus a little perfunctory "improvement" have been able to sell at \$250 an acre at the very least. A little arithmetic, Dr. Busey points out, will reveal that this constitutes a gain of 250,000 per cent on the investment, "which isn't bad." Generally, he says, the unearned increment is far higher than that and reaches astronomical heights. It seems clear therefore that whatever the State of Alaska does with its lands, it will do no worse than the Federal government has done up to now.

